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SUBJECT: UAE GULF SECURITY DIALOGUE (GSD) JULY 20 PLENARY SESSION AND
COS DIALOGUE

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Summary

11. (S/NF) In a July 20 plenary session of the GSD with a large UAE delegation, accompanied by a smaller session with the UAE Chief of Staff, the immediate focus was largely on Iran. Participants reiterated the good defense cooperation that the U.S. and UAE enjoy, while noting the need to improve coordination further to deal with real and urgent threats in the region. In this regard, the UAE put the threat of Iran's potential reaction to a "likely" Israeli attack on its nuclear program at the center of scenarios to be considered. Other issues, to include Yemen, counter-proliferation, Pakistan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and extremism were also addressed, but even these were often seen through the prism of Iranian intentions.

12. (S/NF) This message begins with the Chief of Staff's urgent plea on "munitions" to deal with an unpredictable Iran, followed by a synopsis of GSD plenary proceedings. A list of UAE participants is included at para 20. End summary.

Chief of Staff Presses for Munitions:
Urgent about Iran's unpredictability

13. (S/NF) In a brief session with principals only, Chief of Staff Hamad Thani al-Romaithi (who also participated in the MbZ dinner and was on his way to Lebanon later July 20) said the UAE cannot act alone in the region and needs coherent plans -- especially to deal with the unique threat of Iran. How to deter Iran without provoking it is a challenge. Ambassador al-Otaiba emphasized how the proximity of the UAE to Iran magnifies the threat perception; the CoS said UAE military planning had to consider worst-case scenarios.

14. (S/NF) ASD Vershbow said the USG did not disagree with the UAE

evaluation of Iran's objectives, but that we need to work to prevent them from achieving those objectives. Diplomacy is only one tool. The USG wants to help provide the UAE with defensive capabilities and our troop presence here should help act as a deterrent to Iran. We don't want to signal that we will give up on diplomacy, yet in parallel to that effort we intend to keep the pressure on Iran. We appreciate the candor of our defense engagement with the UAE. We are dealing with an unpredictable foe and need to take all precautions.

15. (S/NF) The CoS said Iran will remain a threat in any case, as its objectives are constant. He added that if the Israelis strike, Iran may lash out at the UAE and around the Gulf -- one can conceive of many possible scenarios from missile strikes to attacks on isolated islands to the exploitation of 130,000 Iranians living in the UAE. The UAE therefore seeks ongoing support from the region's "main actor," the U.S., and desires close defense coordination. The UAE's friends in the GCC, on the other hand, are not always realistic in their approach to Iran, he said, citing Arab misinterpretation of "brotherly" Iraqi intentions with regards to Kuwait back in 1990.

16. (S/NF) ASD Vershbow said that our message to Iran is that threats against our allies will not go unanswered. We need to be prepared in case deterrence does not work, with the realization that with or without nuclear weapons Iran seeks to be a dominant power in the region. This is a very interconnected region, asserted the CoS. "If I was in the Israelis' shoes, I would attack, to reduce the nuclear threat." The first reaction may be that the Iranians launch missiles against targets in Israel and then the Gulf, he added. Air Chief Sweidan added that the UAE needs munitions on a tighter timeline than previously assumed -- with urgent needs in 2010, 11, and 12. He said the UAE Armed Forces could receive munitions from the U.S. inventory and then replenish them later (he supplied the same list of requirements as was relayed some months ago, noting that they had only received a "political" answer to that inquiry thus far).

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17. (S/NF) The CoS was appreciative of Patriot deployments, progress on command and control systems, and movement toward more effective shared early warning, but lamented that other pieces of the air defense puzzle require immediate attention. Ambassador al-Otaiba reiterated the need to "borrow from U.S. inventories" to meet urgent timelines. A/S Vershbow said we were leaning far forward for the UAE on THAAD, for example, and would continue to look into opportunities to assist, including filling gaps before UAE-purchased systems were delivered.

18. (S/NF) Highlighting the importance of close defense coordination, the CoS noted that in the event of an attack the UAE may have no time to react. Taking the fight to Iran may require "passing over U.S. aircraft carriers," for example, so we need to be in lock-step at all phases of preparation and operation.

Introductory remarks

19. (C) The Plenary session of the U.S.-UAE Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) convened July 20 at the Armed Forces Officers' Club, with newly promoted Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Ali Hamad Subaih al-Kaabi stating that the "small but significant" Gulf region makes a large contribution to global peace and development and seeks enhanced cooperation with the U.S. He cited UAE troops in Afghanistan, U.S. use of UAE bases, a robust intelligence exchange, strong counter-terror efforts, and improved border control as evidence that the UAE shares common goals with the U.S. Citing the "high importance" of strong relations among GCC members, he thanked the U.S. for its role in the defense relationship and wanted to learn more about U.S. strategies vis-a-vis Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine.

110. (C) Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow, leading the U.S. team along with Assistant State of State for Political-Military Affairs Shapiro, expressed confidence in the strength and future of the bilateral relationship, anchored by common strategic interests. Recounting shared priorities, he noted that the GSD was being taken to a new level as we seek strategic synergy in facing real threats

like Iran -- which we are obligated to defend against. He called for a more multi-lateral approach to counter-proliferation and cited the need to prepare missile defenses. He lauded the UAE decision to host LEADING EDGE 2009 and cited the 123 agreement with the U.S. as the high standard on civil nuclear cooperation. The responsible drawdown of U.S. troops in Iraq also calls for continued UAE support, he emphasized, as Iraq seeks to assume responsibility for its own security and integrate into the region. The UAE's advanced fighter squadron, growing air defense net, participation in RED FLAG, and leadership of CTF 152 are all indications of a maturing defense capability.

¶11. (C) A/S Shapiro emphasized the USG desire to ensure regional stability, counter extremism, curb WMD proliferation, and tackle the inter-related challenges of the region holistically. He focused on the threat from Iran, stressing that the USG was attempting a diplomatic solution -- if possible -- and would proceed in consultation with our friends in the region. Recounting the basic components of our Iraq policy, he also highlighted the need to strengthen the institutions of government in Lebanon and build capacity within the Palestinian Authority.

UAE offers threat analysis: all Iran

¶12. (S) The UAE's presentation of the primary regional threat assessed that Iran's leadership "genuinely believes that it has emerged victorious from its clash with the U.S.," with gains made in Iraq, an expanding "Shi'a tide" in the region, an ongoing nuclear program, missile modernization, and continued provocation of resistance in Gaza. While Israel was able to neutralize to some degree threats on its flanks in Lebanon (2006) and Gaza (2008/9),

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Iran's main goals of regional influence were not inhibited. The UAE assessment continued that Israel may act on its perception that only "extreme" (and unlikely) UNSC action or unilateral Israeli military action can slow Iran's nuclear goals. As Iran continues to reject a political solution, the UAE must prepare for the fallout should Israel act on its fears. With that, the briefer introduced a slide on Iran's capabilities, with missile sites in the south of Iran and concentric circles showing their likely range all covering UAE territory.

¶13. (S) Iranian promotion of "Shi'ism," coupled with sleeper cells in the region, magnify the threat articulated by the UAE. If attacked, it may seek to obstruct shipping in the Gulf and control (more) islands over which it does not have legitimate sovereignty. Working in alliance with al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Iraqi Shi'a, Iran is poised to do damage of an unpredictable nature if/when provoked. In sum, Iran continued as the traditional focus of the threat briefing offered by the UAE at GSD sessions. Other regional concerns noted in lesser detail included Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, and piracy.

Strategic Cooperation

¶14. (C) In further briefings, the UAE team highlighted good operational cooperation with the U.S. and offered a review of the maturing Critical National Infrastructure Agency (CNIA) which is taking charge of security on land, along the coast, and off shore -- with an initial focus on Abu Dhabi but an intent to serve as a federal agency. The U.S. Coast Guard and NYPD were cited as partners in the growing CNIA mission, with a U.S. promise of first-time "Nuclear Security Training" in the near future.

¶15. (S) The UAE delegation received a draft "UAE National Defense Strategy and U.S.-UAE Comprehensive Defense Strategy" document outlining key priorities in the defense relationship (a document proposed by UAE Ambassador to Washington Yousef al-Otaiba). Without immediate comment on the substance of the USG draft, al-Kaabi said the UAE would reply via embassy channels and looked forward to continuing the dialogue.

Q&A on Iran, Yemen

¶16. (C) When the floor was open to general discussion, two topics dominated: Iran and Yemen. The UAE asked whether the USG had any new information since the December 2007 NIE regarding Iran's nuclear weaponization program; the U.S. team noted that a new estimate was in progress but it was premature to comment. The DMI representative also noted that Iran exploits crises for its own advantage, making the defusing of crises like Palestine and Lebanon imperative if we are to keep Iran in check. In the case of Palestine, he added optimistically, it is time to "cut to the chase" and deal with final status issues; Lebanon is also ripe for progress, he suggested, without a drawn out process.

¶17. (S) On Yemen, the UAE said it shared a U.S. concern that a "failed state" could emerge on the Arabian Peninsula, with terrorist partners and Iranian influence further poisoning the mix. A collapsed Yemen "gives us Afghanistan," said Commander of the Air Force and Air Defense Major General Hamad bin Suweidan al-Qamzi, and then it presents a long-term threat to the region. He said the UAE was coordinating economic development support for Yemen while also trying to assist with political reconciliation. He noted the dangers of "another Somalia." ASD Vershbow hoped the UAE could help secure a unified GCC approach to Yemen, as time is running out on the secession question and Yemen cannot afford a "two front" war with both secessionists and the Al-Houthi insurgency. In a brief discussion of Pakistan, all agreed that Islamabad needs to focus resources to fight insurgency rather than obsessing with India as its potential military foe.

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Positive Conclusions

¶18. (C) Enhanced U.S.-UAE cooperation to counter troublesome financial flows and cash smuggling -- solidified during a recent visit by Treasury Secretary Geithner -- was noted by the Charge as another area of productive engagement. Both sides also put in very positive words about the role of the Air Warfare Center which has become a proud center of excellence for the region.

¶19. (S) In closing, al-Kaabi raised Iran yet again, noting that its leadership is not likely to change fundamentally and therefore the threat is likely to continue. He looked forward to ongoing discussion of the defense strategy discussed earlier as we continue to pursue a common vision.

¶20. (SBU) UAE delegation:

--- Staff Major General Ali Hamad Subaih al-Kaabi, Deputy Chief of Staff
--- Staff Major General (Pilot) Hamad bin Suweidan al-Qamzi, Commander of Air Force and Air Defense
--- Staff Colonel Abdullah Saeed al-Hamoodi, Intelligence and Military Security
--- Lt. Colonel (Dr.) Albadr Shareef al-Shatri, Intelligence and Military Security
--- Staff Brigadier General Khalfan al-Kaabi, Ground Forces
--- Staff Colonel (Pilot) Salim Saeed, Ground Forces
--- Staff Lt. Colonel Abdullah al-Yamahi, Directorate of Joint Operations
--- Brigadier General (Dr.) Humaid Ali al-Kitbi, Purchasing Directorate
--- Staff Colonel Saeed Rashid al-Shihi, CNIA
--- Staff Brigadier General Mohamed Murad al-Baloushi, Air Forces
--- Colonel (Engineer) Ahmad Sultan, Air Forces
--- Staff Lt. Colonel Engineer Jamal Mohamed al-Ameri, Air Forces
--- Major Juma Sultan, Air Forces
--- Staff Major (Pilot) Ali Saleh, Air Forces
--- Major (Pilot) Abdullah Sultan al-Mazroui, GSD secretariat for plenary

¶21. (U) The GSD traveling party approved this message .

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